

Congressional Armed Services committee hearings skirt January 6 coup attempt

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In the first public hearings in which Gen. Mark Milley has testified under oath since the publication of books detailing the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman's fears that Donald Trump would stage a fascistic coup, both Democrats and Republicans largely skirted the issue.

Milley testified on Tuesday and Wednesday, together with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Frank McKenzie, in back-to-back hearings by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees on the ending of US military operations in Afghanistan.

He summed up the two days' worth of testimony before the House committee on Wednesday, providing the most explicit admission thus far from any US official that Washington suffered a humiliating defeat in its 20-year war, while claiming the chaotic US evacuation operation from Kabul had been a success.

"Strategically, the war is lost—the enemy is in Kabul," Milley told the committee, referring to the Taliban's overrunning of the Afghan capital on August 15. "So, you have strategic failure while you simultaneously have an operational and tactical success by the soldiers on the ground."

The Joint Chiefs chairman added, "It wasn't lost in the last 20 days or even 20 months. There's a cumulative effect to a series of strategic decisions that go way back."

The bulk of the hearings was consumed with vitriolic denunciations by Republicans of the tactics pursued by the Biden administration in the final days of the two-decade-long US imperialist adventure in Afghanistan, countered by Democratic defenses of both the administration and the military.

There was little appetite on the part of politicians of either party to probe the reasons for Washington's abject failure—after spending trillions of dollars, sacrificing thousands of US lives and killing hundreds of thousands of Afghans—to create a viable puppet regime in Afghanistan and realize its strategic aim of securing a foothold in a country bordering China, Iran and the oil-rich former Soviet republics of Central Asia. There were no questions whatsoever relating to culpability for the countless war crimes carried out by US imperialism against the Afghan people.

The hearings were noteworthy for the acrimonious attacks by Republican legislators on the US military command. For decades, Republicans and Democrats have heard commander after commander of the catastrophic US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq testifying before the House and Senate panels, treating them with what can only be described as abject obsequiousness.

A central line of the Republican attack focused on the acknowledgement by Generals Milley and McKenzie that they had recommended keeping 2,500 US troops on the ground in Afghanistan to forestall the imminent collapse of the puppet regime of President Ashraf Ghani, who ended up fleeing the country with hundreds of millions of dollars as the Taliban reached Kabul.

These recommendations and Biden's rejection of them were well known in Washington, but Republicans seized upon them. They cited an August 19 "ABC News" interview in which Biden was pressed as to whether he had been advised that keeping 2,500 troops in Afghanistan could maintain a "stable situation" and he replied, "No one said that to me that I can recall." This proved, Republicans charged, that Biden is a "liar."

The questioning also centered on venomous attacks against Milley over three recently published books in which he was quoted in relation to the crisis surrounding the attempt of Trump and his supporters to overturn the 2020 election.

Asked by Tennessee Republican Senator Marsha Blackburn whether he had spoken to the authors of the books, Milley acknowledged that he had, while claiming he could not testify as to whether he was "accurately represented," because he had not read them.

Blackburn attacked Milley for "making time to talk to these authors, burnishing your image, building that bluster, but then not putting the focus on Afghanistan," going on to state that he, Austin and McKenzie may be remembered as "the three that broke the military."

Others pressed this same line of attack, including the right-wing Republican supporters of the January 6 coup, including Missouri Republican Senator Josh Hawley and Florida Republican Congressman Matt Gaetz, both of whom demanded Milley's resignation. Gaetz accused Milley of being "far more interested in what your perception is and how people think about you in insider Washington books than you care about winning."

As to the content of the books, questioning by the Republicans was extremely circumscribed, while Democrats largely ignored the issue.

The main Republican focus was on the revelation in the book by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, *Peril*, that Milley had twice called his Chinese counterpart, Gen. Li Zuo Cheng, on the eve of the US presidential election and in the wake of the Capitol insurrection, to allay rising Chinese fears that Trump was

preparing an attack on China in a desperate bid to remain in power.

In his testimony, Milley insisted that he had made the calls with the full knowledge and approval of Trump civilian appointees at the Pentagon and that their purpose was to “de-escalate” and assure General Li that “We are not going to attack you.”

This did not stop Alaska Republican Senator Dan Sullivan from accusing Milley of “giving a heads-up to the Chinese Communist Party,” adding that if his Chinese counterpart had acted similarly he would have been “shot.”

The other questions related to the *Peril* revelations centered on a January 8 conversation between Milley and Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Republicans demanded to know whether Milley had stated his agreement with Pelosi’s characterization of Trump as “crazy.” Milley insisted that he had told Pelosi at the time that he was “not qualified to determine the mental health of the president of the United States.”

There was no interest by politicians of either party to probe the substance of the conversation, which was whether Trump could launch a nuclear weapon as part of a coup plot to remain in power. Milley included a memorandum with his written testimony, stating that he had assured Pelosi that Trump could not launch a nuclear attack by himself and that existing “processes, protocols and procedures” precluded an “illegal, unauthorized or accidental launch.”

Nor did the US legislators ask about the Woodward-Costa book’s report of an extraordinary secret meeting of senior officers convened by Milley in which he demanded that they pledge not to carry out any orders for a nuclear attack, including from Trump, without his say-so.

Neither did any of the congress members or senators bother to ask Milley whether the book was accurate in recounting a conversation in which CIA Director Gina Haspel warned the general, “We are on our way to a right-wing coup.” Nor did they ask whether it was true that Pelosi told him, in a passage clearly copied from a phone call transcript, that Trump should have been “arrested on the spot” for carrying out a “coup d’etat against us so he can stay in office.”

While Senator Blackburn elicited an affirmative response to her question as to whether Milley had spoken to *Washington Post* reporters Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker, authors of *I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump’s Catastrophic Final Year*, no one on either the Senate or the House committee ventured to ask Milley about the statements attributed to him in the book.

In it, he is quoted as telling his aides in the run-up to the January 6 fascist-led assault on the Capitol, “This is a Reichstag moment, the gospel of the Führer,” referring to the 1933 Reichstag Fire, which provided the pretext for Adolf Hitler’s assumption of dictatorial powers.

The book reported that Milley was meeting regularly with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assess the threat of a coup and draw up contingency plans, as well, no doubt, to gauge the loyalty of the various military commands.

According to the book, Milley “kept having a stomach-churning feeling that some of the worrisome early stages of 20th-century fascism in Germany were replaying in 21st-century America,” that Trump was echoing the rhetoric of Hitler and that fanatical Trump

supporters in the fascist Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and similar groups were “brownshirts” and “the same people we fought in World War II.”

The Republicans clearly had no interest in shining a light on these statements, but the Democrats also had no desire to expose the depth of the threat posed on January 6 to the American public.

The only direct reference to the coup attempt of January 6 came Wednesday from Republican Congresswoman Liz Cheney of Wyoming, and it was highly revealing.

Cheney began her remarks by condemning the Republican attacks on Milley as “despicable.” She went on to describe the assault on the Capitol as “an effort to stop the constitutionally prescribed process of counting electoral votes. It was the first time in our nation’s history we did not have a peaceful transfer of power.” She also charged her fellow Republicans, including those sitting in the hearing, with “attempting to obstruct the investigation into that attack, attempting to whitewash what happened.”

Cheney praised Milley for “standing in the breach when so many, including many in this room, failed to do so.”

“Standing in the breach” in military terms means holding back an attack when other defenses have failed. The clear implication is that General Milley played a key role in preventing a successful coup by denying Trump support from the US military.

The book by the *Washington Post* reporters quotes Milley as telling fellow senior officers in relation to Trump’s coup attempt, “They may try, but they’re not going to f**king succeed. You can’t do this without the military. ... We’re the guys with the guns.”

That the bulwark against a Trump coup was Milley and “the guys with the guns” is testimony to the rotting out of American democracy and its institutions.

The collaboration of the Democrats—along with their pseudo-left accomplices—with the Republicans in keeping a lid on these revelations is testimony to the fact that they fear a revolt from below far more than a coup orchestrated by a Hitler-lover in the White House.



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